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United States Department of Agriculture

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

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APHIS: Safeguarding American Agriculture



Safeguarding American Agriculture

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is an action-oriented agency that works with other Federal agencies, Congress, States, agricultural interests, and the general public to carry out its mission to protect the health and value of American agriculture and natural resources.

APHIS strives to assure its customers and stakeholders that it is on guard against the introduction or reemergence of animal and plant pests and diseases that could limit production and damage export markets. At the same time, APHIS also monitors and responds to potential acts of agricultural bioterrorism, invasive species, diseases of wildlife and livestock, and conflicts between humans and wildlife. APHIS also addresses sanitary and phytosanitary trade barriers and certain issues relating to the humane treatment of animals. Finally, APHIS ensures that biotechnology-derived agricultural products are safe for release in the environment.





Carrying Out the Mission

At the end of March 2003, APHIS employed roughly 6,000 people with a wide range of scientific, technical, and administrative skills in all 50 States, several territories, and some 25 countries around the world. The workforce is organized into six operational program units—Animal Care, Biotechnology Regulatory Services, International Services, Plant Protection and Quarantine, Veterinary Services, and Wildlife Services—and three management support units—Legislative and Public Affairs, Marketing and Regulatory Programs Business Services, and Policy and Program Development.

All APHIS mission activities are carried out under the provisions of specific Federal laws. Several recent acts of Congress, including the Plant Protection Act (2000), the Animal Health Protection Act (2002), and the Public Health Security and Bioterrorism Preparedness Act (2002), have expanded the scope of APHIS' mission and provided for additional protective responsibilities.





Challenges and Changes Ahead

Although APHIS' human and financial resources and legal authorities are considerable, the agency continues to face significant challenges in achieving its mission. Some of these include responding to an increased risk of the introduction of invasive species and foreign animal diseases, protecting U.S. agricultural interests from imported health threats, and ensuring that U.S. agricultural exports are unimpeded by the sanitary or phytosanitary regulations of trading partners.

Moreover, some 2,600 former APHIS inspectors have been called upon to take part in a defining moment in our country's history and assist the Department of Homeland Security in protecting the Nation. These men and women have the extremely important task of ensuring that the country has a more unified border inspection force, while at the same time affirming and preserving APHIS' expertise in protecting American agriculture. This unique arrangement will not

only increase the overall inspection force ensuring compli-

ance with USDA

regulations but

also enable

APHIS to focus

on strengthening

its other activities

in the protection

system.





New Direction

After evaluating the current challenges and opportunities that exist today, APHIS management has developed a new strategic plan of action that will set the agency's course over the next 5 years. During this time, APHIS is committed to focusing on the following overarching goals: safeguarding the health of animals, plants, and ecosystems in the United States; facilitating safe agricultural trade; and ensuring effective and efficient management of programs to achieve its mission.

As part of its new strategic plan, APHIS also intends to strengthen key components of its protection system by focusing on the following objectives:

- Ensuring the safe research, release, and movement of agricultural biotechnology;
- Strengthening the agency's emergency preparedness and response;
- Resolving trade barriers related to sanitary and phytosanitary requirements;
- Reducing domestic threats through increased offshore threat-assessment and risk-reduction activities;





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- Reducing the risk of invasive species introductions by enhancing risk-analysis capabilities; and
- Managing issues related to the health of U.S. animal and plant resources and conflicts with wildlife.

Throughout all of APHIS' planning for the future, one thing remains clear. The future of APHIS is the same as the past. It is protection. It is safeguarding America's borders. It is ensuring that the health of America's agriculture is never threatened. Although the processes by which the agency protects America's healthy and diverse food supply are being increasingly challenged, APHIS is committed to taking the lead in building and maintaining a world-class system of pest exclusion, surveillance, detection, diagnosis, and response.

For more information, visit
<<http://www.aphis.usda.gov>>.

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